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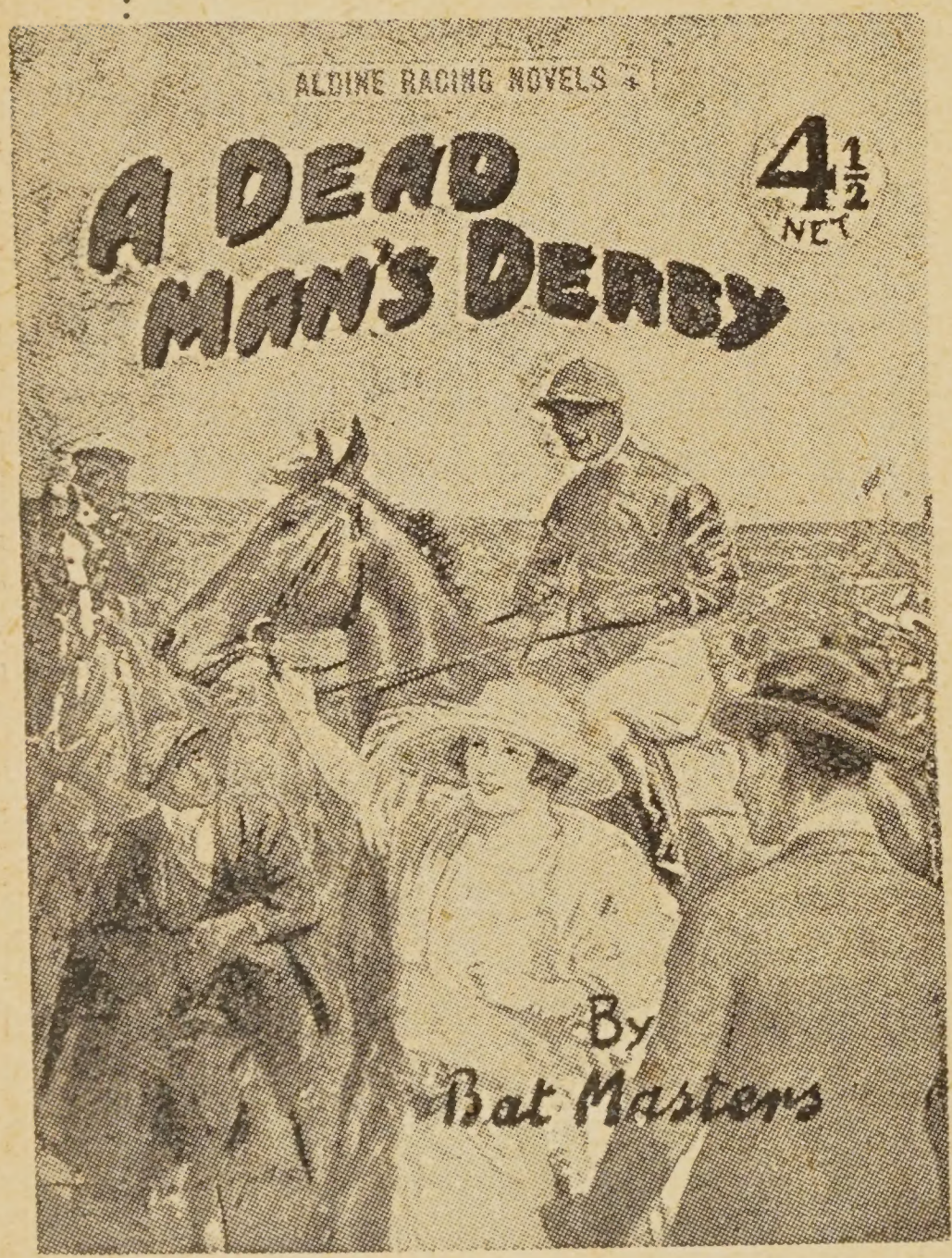

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Buffalo Bill's Lost Clue

Stirring Adventures Against Outlaws and Red Men

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CHAPTER 1.

Sport for Desperadoes.

In one of the most inaccessible parts of New Mexico, yet not far from Santa Fe, a small cluster of adobe buildings sheltered a score of the worst ruffians in the Territory. Their captain, owing to the ease with which he invariably escaped the long arm of the law, had long ago received the nickname of Grasshopper Bill.

Grasshopper Bill's chief claim to the respect and fear of his fellow-outlaws lay in his prowess with rifle and revolver, for he was certainly a dead shot.

A species of grim humour had led the rascals to dub their principal building "Cutthroat Hall," and this suggestive sign, painted in vermilion letters upon a dirty-white background, confronted every traveller whom ill-chance led to the threshold of that particular shanty.

One afternoon half a dozen men, including Grasshopper Bill himself, foregathered in the saloon expressly to kill time with a greasy pack of duplicated cards and a pair of loaded dice.

The bar-tender supplied his guests liberally with cocktails to suit their various tastes, and then took care to watch the progress of the game from the neighbourhood of the door. Experience had taught him that a half-inch deal counter was not enough shelter for an onlooker when little differences of opinion among the players resulted in a generous exchange of pistol-shots.

The game proceeded amid much profanity, and ominous signs of discord arose when one of the players appeared to be winning heavily.

The bar-tender began to whistle softly and keep his eyes fixed on Grasshopper Bill, for he saw what was coming. The successful player was a trapper named Slug Seven, who at uncertain intervals would visit the adobe town, where he might always reckon on congenial company.

"Reckon you've got kind o' practised out West, pard," remarked Grasshopper Bill, fixing ferrety orbs on the man.

"Waal, now, boss, it fair riles me ter see them dollar notes looking sort o' innercent, as if they warn't no more than dirt," replied Slug Seven, serenely planting his elbows on the rough table.

A big scar on Grasshopper Bill's right cheek burned an ugly colour. It was a danger signal. The other men dropped their cards and leaned back.

"Guess it's time fer milking," said Slug Seven, with a careless laugh.

His left hand went down to his belt so did Grasshopper Bill's.

"'Bout time, pard," remarked the latter rogue complacently.

For a minute or two the men sat facing each other, each with a smile lurking about the corners of his mouth and murder in his heart.

"When you've done, pards, we'll look slippery with the game," said one of the players; then, turning to the bar-tender, he demanded to know what he meant by skulking round the door while the gentlemen were waiting for fresh cocktails.

Before the unlucky bar-tender could offer a reply a couple of shots in rapid succession broke the spell. These were followed by a lively fusillade, fierce oaths, and then a pause.

Neither Grasshopper Bill nor Slug Seven had been hit, but at one and the same moment their attention had been diverted to a stranger who had pulled up outside the shanty. He had ridden up just as the trouble began, and was

a person well over six feet in height, with a slender form, but athletic, broad shoulders. His face was singularly handsome and refined, while his bearing bespoke the gentleman. He was clad like a clergyman, and carried no weapons that could be seen.

"Gunning again, boys?" he cried, in a clear, ringing voice as he glanced through the open door. "Why don't you drop that sort of thing? It's a fool's game."

Grasshopper Bill, forgetting his quarrel with Slug Seven, turned to the latter with a puzzled expression.

"Guess this ain't usual," he blurted out. "Take me for a mutton-headed cayuse if it ain't a parson!"

"Say, he'll make good sport," the trapper chuckled grimly.

A significant look passed between himself and Grasshopper Bill.

"Come right in, stranger," the latter shouted. "I reckon that beast of yours wants a rest."

"Thank you; a drink of cool, clear water will do the poor brute good. I'll fasten up here," and so saying, the newcomer dismounted and, with the assistance of the wondering bar-tender, tethered the animal to one of the rings let into the shanty for that purpose.

Meanwhile the six desperadoes reseated themselves.

"Let the chips stay on the board, pards," whispered Grasshopper Bill; "we'll get the mugwump ter shell out. Leave him clean and dry, thet's the game. And if he starts the long tongue we'll raise Cain. It ain't often a parson comes ter Cutthroat Hall."

A loud burst of laughter greeted this sally, but the stranger apparently overheard a portion of this remark.

"In which case, gentlemen," he observed, as he strode briskly over the threshold, "I must ask you first, as a matter of convenience, to put aside those dangerous weapons. If you care to do so, I shall be very glad to keep you company for a little while. Otherwise——"

He broke off significantly, and calmly eyed the six nonplussed ruffians. There was just the suspicion of a smile at the corners of his fine mouth.

"Mebbe you'll start the game, boss?" observed Slug Seven, with a meaning glance to his comrades.

"I carry no weapons, if that is what you mean," declared the stranger.

"Then I guess you ain't been in this part before," put in one of the six.

"No. I came from Santa Fe. My name is Alec Kingston."

"A parson?" insinuated Grasshopper Bill, in a note of contempt.

"Yes, a parson," replied the other.

Though he said no more, the men were uncomfortably aware that he was waiting for them to comply with his request. They looked questioningly towards Grasshopper Bill, and that worthy, finding he would have to take the initiative, made a significant gesture, and in a moment his companions, following his example, placed their shooting-irons on the counter behind.

"Guess, stranger, you'd sooner have a bowl o' milk than whisky straight?" sneered Slug Seven.

"Thank you, I would."

At the request of Grasshopper Bill the bar-tender came forward and placed a stool at the head of the table for the newcomer, who thus was seated with his back to the bar. His arrival had already created a good deal of excitement in the settlement, bringing nearly a dozen more choice ruffians up to the scratch. They stalked into the saloon with looks of wonder when they took in the situation, which, from their point of view, was certainly startling.

Not only were Grasshopper Bill and his colleagues unarmed, but they were actually engaged in fleecing, or at any rate attempting to fleece, the stranger-clergyman at poker.

For a while the bar-tender was kept pretty busy in supplying liquor for all, but presently, at a sign from Grasshopper Bill, he fixed his attention on the game.

In order to egg on the Reverend Alexander Kingston, the boys had allowed him to win uninterruptedly, which was not difficult, seeing the cards were manipulated in such manner as to ensure that he had a good show. He seemed to enter thoroughly, though quietly, into the spirit of the game, but whether he suspected the ulterior purpose of the players no one could say.

At last came a pause, more refreshments were provided, and, amid many winks and nods and a good deal of coarse banter, the final game began.

The young clergyman raked more dollars into his already considerable pile. He played so well that his opponents began to eye each other uneasily.

Two or three of the onlookers deemed it time to distract his attention with sandwiches and a fresh supply of milk. He accepted these attentions with a quiet courtesy which wholly disconcerted the rascals.

Meanwhile, the bar-tender signalled that the victim's hand held "fours."

Quick as a flash Grasshopper Bill slipped a sixth card into the reverend gentleman's hand while the latter's attention was concentrated on a rascal who had made an ineffectual attempt to annex a portion of his winnings.

A grim smile went round the board, for all knew that the additional card would nullify their victim's hand. In order, however, to conceal their gratification and to further their subtle purpose, Grasshopper Bill made a significant gesture to a pair of rogues by the door. Instantly the latter developed a violent quarrel, and it looked as if blood would be shed.

The young parson raised his voice deprecatingly what time he quietly munched a huge sandwich.

The bar-tender gesticulated in a wild fashion behind him, but no one seemed to notice.

Peace was restored as the Rev. Kingston finished eating, and he smiled genially on the expectant sharpers.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for a very pleasant and profitable half-hour," he said, rising from the table, and at the same time placing his own original cards upon the board. "I hold the top hand and take the stakes."

Deliberately he bent over and swept the board clean of every coin and dollar-bill, cramming the enormous winnings into his capacious pockets. Then, bowing coolly to the astounded rogues, he passed out of the saloon, unfastened his horse, mounted, and rode slowly away.

Nearly twenty rogues stood agape. Dumbfounded, they could not speak, and for once they were too utterly taken aback to think of riddling the retreating stranger with a volley from their six-shooters.

At last Grasshopper Bill turned furiously upon the bar-tender.

"You blithering fool!" he roared. "What did that durned sport do with the sixth card?"

And the bar-tender, stung to anger, replied:

"He ate it with his sandwich, you silly owl!"

CHAPTER 2.

Attacked by Comanches.

A SHORT pause followed that extraordinary announcement, then a roar of laughter broke from the desperadoes who had not participated in the game.

Grasshopper Bill sprang to his feet, and, snatching up his revolver, he in an instant covered the unlucky bar-tender. There was a flash and a report, and the man, with a cry of pain, clapped his hand to his ear, the lobe of which had been shot away.

"Guess I'll serve the next fool likewise if he can't keep a civil tongue in his head," growled the ruffian.

He looked pretty hard at Slug Seven, but the trapper merely shrugged his shoulders and tilted his seat back. All at once he started up, clapping his fists upon the table, and making it ring under the blow.

"Bill, yer ain't nothing better than a mutton-headed Greaser!" he shouted. "I guess that parson sport's fairly done us. You've heard tell how Ned Masters' been sniffing round the Comanches' treasure——"

"Go on," said Grasshopper Bill, hoarsely. He began to understand what the trapper was driving at.

"Waal, it were settled when the young buck got a tidy bit fer housekeeping he war going ter marry Lucy Neil, the gal on Neil's ranch. That parson sport's come West ter splice 'em, and you've been an' let him slip through yer fingers."

"Great Rockies! Pards, fetch him back! He ain't got far! Fetch him back, or drop him if he don't come quiet!" roared the angry and excited villain.

The men, headed by Slug Seven, made a simultaneous rush for the open, and in less than five minutes all of them had secured their respective mounts and were galloping along in the direction taken by the young clergyman.

Grasshopper Bill was left alone in the saloon. Possessed by a strange uneasiness, he presently threw a glance towards the door, and what he there perceived almost took his breath away. Half a dozen troopers of the United States Cavalry suddenly appeared at the outlet. He had been trapped.

Up went his brace of revolvers.

"Durn yew!" he yelled. "I've got the drop on yew all! Don't crowd me! Stand back!"

"I'm afraid you're too late this time, Grasshopper Bill," put in a familiar voice from behind.

Instinctively the rascal wheeled about, and as he did so his face turned a shade paler, for at a little door opening into the rear of the saloon behind the bar stood a couple more troopers with levelled revolvers, and behind them was Buffalo Bill!

"Drop those guns. Quick! or I shall order the men to fire," continued the scout.

Grasshopper Bill hesitated till a warning shot cracked across the saloon; then giving a yell of terror he obeyed.

"Now, then, boys, get hold of him," said Cody. "That's Grasshopper Bill, and there are one or two warrants out for his arrest."

The troopers in the rear, as well as three who had dismounted and were standing on the threshold of the saloon, made a move to secure the desperado. The latter for a moment stood immovable, as if waiting for the men to draw near, but a desperate plan had entered his head—he would not be taken alive; he would not be taken at all.

As the men came up he suddenly flung himself headlong forward, and went sprawling beneath the table.

"Hold him!" shouted Buffalo Bill.

Two soldiers made a grab; but in a moment part of the floor collapsed. In an instant they vanished with their captive and the table, while the loud, sullen splash which immediately followed keenly alarmed their comrades.

"There is water beneath; the scoundrel has loosened a trap-door," cried Cody. "Look sharp, men, or he'll give you the slip."

In a twinkling the troopers, reinforced by those from without, darted to the edge of the square aperture in the floor. The trap which Grasshopper Bill had unfastened was swinging ponderously on its hinges. The water was shallow, for the two men below could be seen floundering up to their waists.

A light was produced, and an important discovery was then made which caused Grasshopper Bill to be forgotten for the moment; for, lumped down directly beneath the trap-door, the broken end of a large safe stamped with the Government mark was visible.

"That's the article we're after," exclaimed Buffalo Bill; "that's the paymaster's safe stolen a fortnight ago from the escort by Comanches. How in the name of fortune did it get here?"

"Guess the Comanches couldn't do nothing with it, boss, and the adobe town boys must have picked it up," suggested one of the men.

"It's burst open, anyway, chief. Ten thousand dollars is gone," added one of the troopers from below as he examined the contents.

The other man now discovered a ladder, and planting this upon the top of the damaged safe, a means of communication with the saloon was established.

Bidding three men search the submerged cellar for Grasshopper Bill, the scout dispatched a couple of the others to ascertain what had become of Alec Kingston. He was feeling uneasy on the young clergyman's account, who had earlier in the day wandered from a small escort which had been dispatched from Fort Ben, under Buffalo Bill's command, to punish the Comanches, and if possible recover the safe which they had stolen while under transit from Sante Fe.

In following up Kingston's trail the little force had come upon the adobe settlement just after the desperadoes had galloped forth.

"Guess Grasshopper's got clear away, chief," at length called one of the soldiers from below. "Seems ter me the

shanty's built over an underground stream, and there ain't no telling which way he's took."

Scarcely had the trooper finished speaking when the silence without was broken by a perfect pandemonium of yells and wild cries.

Buffalo Bill, who had been about to descend through the trap-door, drew himself quickly back, and called to his men below to hasten up. They, too, had heard the distant shouts, and knew full well what they signified.

The settlement was being attacked by the Comanches!

In an incredibly short space of time the troopers had gained their saddles.

Those whom the scout had sent out to search for Alec Kingston were seen galloping at breakneck pace towards the saloon. Not far behind raced a crowd of white desperadoes, firing back at the redskins as they neared the settlement.

The soldiers were the first to reach the saloon.

"A thousand Comanches are sweeping across the plain, chief," exclaimed one as Buffalo Bill met them.

"Retreat is cut off," put in the other. "I guess we'll have to make a fight of it with these beauties."

He indicated with a jerk of his thumb the band of outlaws, a few of whom had now ridden close up. Their surprise at finding the chief of scouts and a number of uniformed troopers there for a moment overcame their fears of the Indians.

"I'm blistered if we ain't all been took in a trap!" cried one man sharply.

"You'd better tell your friends that unless we all combine against the common foe probably not a man will leave the settlement alive," said Buffalo Bill.

"You bet I will. Guess it's a truce between us, pard."

"Yes," answered Buffalo Bill. "Who's your leader?"

"Grasshopper Bill."

"He's gone."

"The blarmed coward! that's like him, dead-shot though he is."

"Never mind him," said Buffalo Bill, sharply. "Tell your men to put themselves under my command if they want to save their skins."

This was quickly done.

On all sides could now be seen the Comanche warriors, whose loud yells filled the air.

All at once the air was darkened with arrow-heads, and two or three men dropped from their saddles.

"Now, then, boys, close up round the shanty," said Buffalo Bill, addressing his troopers. "Don't dismount; our hope lies in the open, not in this death-trap. Let fly at them—quick!"

The words were scarcely spoken when a death-dealing volley issued from the weapons of the desperate and determined soldiers. Many of the foremost Comanches dropped back, causing the rest to pause.

By this time the outlaw settlers had rallied about the small body of soldiers, and following the latter's example they swept the ranks of the bloodthirsty foe with volley upon volley of musketry.

Notwithstanding the terrible execution done, the Comanches continued to come on, yelling their war-cry and darkening the air with flights of arrows.

A mounted party of redskins, fifty strong, cut off retreat at one end, while fully a couple of hundred braves on foot were streaming through the narrow approach upon the east side. North and south, where the buildings extended in two triangular lines, the Indians were not so numerous.

Nearly half the settlers and four of the troopers had already succumbed to the fury of the redskins' attack, when Buffalo Bill, leaping from the saddle, dashed into an adobe house facing one side of the saloon. His little force meantime kept up a galling fire upon the red men. Suddenly a dense cloud of smoke issued from the building, and a moment later Cody darted back and reached his small force.

"Quick, boys! the smoke will help to cover our movements," he cried. "It's every man for himself now. Keep together if you can, but make for the open. That's your only chance."

The men stared at him aghast. It was evident they looked upon the attempt as sheer madness. Until Buffalo Bill had remounted and moved forth they remained bunched together, firing desperately into the ranks of the foe.

All at once the redskins were hidden behind a blinding cloud of smoke which the wind bore along from the burning adobe house.

The troopers and settlers saw their leader urge his horse in that direction, and they followed his example.

Led by Buffalo Bill, they got past the burning house unnoticed; but the moment they issued from the cover afforded by the smoke they were assailed by flight after flight of arrows. Several more were killed, but the remainder pressed bravely ahead.

Cody seemed to bear a charmed life, for beyond a few scratches he received no wound. As he reached the crest of a sharp rise, however, his horse was shot down, and a cry of dismay broke form the few survivors when they saw him pitch headlong to the ground.

The Comanches were now almost within striking distance.

Buffalo Bill sprang up as five or six fully-fledged warriors closed round him.

Quick as thought he snatched up the body of a warrior who had just been shot down by one of the troopers. Then, with the exercise of marvellous agility and strength, he hurled it into the circle of his deadly foes, sending two of the warriors reeling back under the impact.

An instant later he had got clear of them.

A brief glance showed that his small band of troopers was wiped out, while three of his outlaw allies were endeavouring to escape on foot through a narrow gorge about thirty yards ahead.

Buffalo Bill urged them on, and followed as rapidly as possible. Leaping from boulder to boulder, he gained the edge of the gorge and raced along its uneven bottom. Passing a sharp bend, he suddenly came in sight of the three desperadoes.

They had halted, and were staring up at the precipitous end of the gorge in despair. Buffalo Bill quickly reached them.

"If we can climb yonder hill and get down the other side, there's a chance of reaching the scrub," exclaimed one of the men.

"Something's got to be done, for we're trapped like rats here," replied the scout.

Without more ado he commenced the dangerous climb up the steep side of the hill. The others followed him breathlessly.

At last they reached the crest of the hill, and a faint cheer broke from their parched lips. Its note, however, changed to a cry of dismay when, on glancing down the further slope, they beheld at least a hundred Comanches swarming up.

Upon the north, streaming along from the blazing settlement on the higher ground, and protected by a series of boulders, were more Comanches. Only two sides of the hill offered means for retreat—the one by which the little party had just ascended, and the southern slope, even more perpendicular in its descent; while, as if to increase the helplessness of their position, there was absolutely no cover on the cone of the hill where they stood.

Buffalo Bill looked the danger quietly in the face, but his undisciplined comrades became panic-stricken. They made a rush for the spot they had lately ascended, and then with a dull cry of despair they staggered back.

A score of Comanche braves had assembled in the gorge below, and had cut off all retreat. It were madness to attempt the southern slope, for, save a few bushes clinging here and there to the almost perpendicular side, the bottom was met by ridge upon ridge of needle-like rocks.

With blanched faces and despairing looks the men clustered round Cody.

"There is little hope," remarked the scout quietly. "All we can do is to sell our lives dearly. Get your guns ready."

They were at bay, and swinging up on to the crest of the hill came the hordes of yelling Comanches. Instinctively the little group of white men had moved to the extremity of the southern edge, where, at least, they could not be attacked in the rear. They had not long to wait.

With loud yells of triumph the redskins stormed over the crest, and were met by a deadly rifle fire. Half a dozen dropped back, either killed outright or

mortally wounded, but the others came on, led by no other than Flying Foot, the Comanche chief, who made a special objective of Buffalo Bill himself.

Several more redskins were shot down by the white men, but a moment later the scout's three allies were killed.

The Indians then paused to watch the duel that took place between their chief and the great leader of the pale-faces. The two were about equally matched in agility, but the redskin claimed an advantage in point of size and weight. Moreover, he was fresh and unwounded, whereas Cody was suffering from several painful hurts.

The scout knew that unless by some lucky chance he either disabled or disarmed his savage opponent the struggle could not last long. Very cleverly he parried the chief's terrible strokes, but it was more than he could do to get in a blow himself.

Suddenly he tripped over the body of a stricken desperado, but did not fall.

Swiftly, and with a yell of triumph, Flying Foot sprang at him. Cody took a quick step backwards. A cry of horror then broke from his lips—he was falling headlong into the ravine below!

A dizzy dash through space, then he was conscious of a swift, agonising pain —after that, oblivion!

CHAPTER 3.

A Duel under Water.

NIGHT had fallen when Buffalo Bill recovered from a long spell of unconsciousness. Whether the time was early or late he had no means of ascertaining, for not a star was to be seen. He felt stiff and cold. The first movement caused him excruciating pain.

Uttering a groan he fell back, and lay perfectly still for some minutes. It was whilst in this condition that the whole ghastly past recurred to him. He felt cautiously round and found that his headlong flight had been brought up by one of the bushes growing near the bottom of the ravine. His left arm, bared to the elbow, was caked with blood, and his face had been bruised in the fall.

Owing to the pain, which the very slightest movement caused, Cody began to fear some bones had been broken. Thoroughly alarmed, he scrambled up with some difficulty, and found to his great relief that this fear was ill-founded. He was bruised and shaken, but his limbs were sound.

It was pitch dark, but he recalled to his mind's eye a fairly accurate picture of the bottom of the ravine. He must be within thirty feet of the first ridge of projecting rocks.

Spreading himself flat against the precipitous side of the chasm, he began to work very cautiously round to the edge of the bush. Then, holding on by the roots, he lowered himself towards the rocks beneath and let go.

With a rush and clatter of loose stones Cody struck the bottom. He had slightly under-estimated the distance, and consequently the shock of his fall was greater than he had anticipated. For some time he did not move. A few stones continued to rattle down, making him start uncomfortably lest the sounds were caused by the approach of some of the Comanches.

Again all was still, and, somewhat reassured, Buffalo Bill crawled over the first ridge; then he lowered himself to the second, and thence to the third and fourth successively. The task severely taxed his strength, but it put fresh warmth into his cold and stiff limbs. He had reached the very heart of the ravine where a stream threaded its tortuous passage into the open. A long drink of its cold, clear water greatly refreshed him.

Here he paused, and in the darkness bathed his several wounds, which fortunately were not at all serious. Then, getting under cover of some rocks, he struck a light and examined his pocket-compass. He calculated roughly that Fort Ben lay twenty miles away to the south, and, taking his bearings accordingly, he set forth along the stream. But he had previously adopted the precaution of loading his brace of six-shooters.

Only a little ammunition remained in his pouch when this wise precaution was adopted. His shattered rifle was lying on the crest of the hill, but even had he possessed it the weapon would have been useless save at very close quarters with

the foe, for its cartridges had all been expended.

As Buffalo Bill slowly made his way along, guided by the turnings of the narrow stream he could not but reflect on the terrible fate which had overtaken his own gallant little band and the fearful punishment meted out to the desperadoes, who he was certain had all been killed.

The whole Comanche nation had evidently taken the warpath, and that boded ill for the small force at Fort Ben. He would have to warn the commandant at all hazards.

Cody hoped to reach the fort shortly after break of day. But presently his sorely-taxed strength showed signs of giving out. He had now reached what seemed comparatively open country. Selecting a grassy dell, he lay down, and soon dropped into a heavy sleep.

* * * * *

The scout awoke with a start to find that the sun was several hours high. So exhausted had he been by his recent terrible exertions that Nature had had her way and kept him in a state of unconsciousness for much longer than he had wished.

Buffalo Bill made his way to the nearby stream and refreshed himself by a good wash and a long drink. Then he drew out his pocket-compass and made an alarming discovery. It had been put out of gear by his fall into the ravine on the previous day, and when he had looked at it by matchlight in the darkness its reading had been incorrect.

The scout now realised that the instrument was of no use in pointing the way to Fort Ben. All he could do was to continue south in the direction of the stream, hoping to strike a well-known landmark in due course.

As Buffalo Bill proceeded on his long tramp the aspect of the country gradually changed, and by about four o'clock in the afternoon he had, by following the winding course of the stream, reached the head of what looked like a long but rather narrow lake, having high sloping banks on both sides. They were very irregular, however, and much broken. Not a tree nor a bush of any sort was visible, though going down both banks far into the water were thick clusters of tall reeds, while further out masses of weeds were floating lazily upon the surface.

The air was hot and suffocating, and Buffalo Bill was feeling terribly jaded when he espied a cluster of flowering weeds close up by the bank. Knowing that he would find shelter there he moved to the spot and cautiously negotiated the ground. It was quite firm, and even further out the layer upon layer of matted reeds looked capable of bearing more than his weight. Worming his way in amongst the tall, flowering stems, he lay down, and, grateful for the shelter as well as the rest, he soon dropped off into a doze.

He was roused by a strange feeling of suffocation. Opening his eyes, he was amazed to find himself beneath the surface of the lake. But that was not all. He was in the powerful grasp of some monster.

Suddenly the thought flashed upon him that his assailant was a human being, and that he owed the pressure on his throat to the vice-like grip of a man's hand.

He was not mistaken. Suddenly he saw the point of a blade descend. It pierced his jacket, which he had buttoned before lying down. Quick as thought he swayed round, narrowly avoiding the keen blade, which cut through the water to the bottom.

At the same time he managed to draw his own knife. His unknown opponent evidently perceived the danger, for next moment the terrible grip on Buffalo Bill's throat was removed, and the scout, panting and gasping, rose to the surface. He had, however, scarcely time to expel the air from his lungs when he was assailed from behind.

Struck by a stunning blow, he went under, for the moment powerless to offer the least resistance. As he touched bottom he was again attacked by his cruel and remorseless foe. He struck upward at the miscreant with his hunting-knife. The blow was evidently a mortal one, for something like a choking scream reached the scout's ears.

He struggled to the surface and looked round for the body of his assailant. Not a little to his surprise, he found that he was almost in the centre of the

lake. Then, all at once, an object floated up away to the right.

A few rapid strokes took Buffalo Bill thither. The body was floating face downward. He turned it over, and a cry of surprise and horror broke from his own lips. He was gazing on the death-sealed features of Grasshopper Bill!

The scout's first thought on making this discovery was an ambush. He peered narrowly across the lake, but no one was visible, though, judging by the crushed appearance of the reeds on the opposite bank, it must have been from that side Grasshopper Bill had entered the lake. Reassured, he began to push the body slowly in that direction.

Approaching the bank cautiously, he made for the gap which first had attracted his attention. Here he brought the body of his erstwhile foe and dragged it above the bruised reeds. Something in the appearance of the ground attracted his notice. Those footprints had not been made by moccasins. Leaving the body by the water, he moved stealthily up the slope and followed the track through a rocky cleft.

Suddenly he came face to face with a man in the garb of a trapper.

"Guess you're Colonel Cody, now?" said the stranger, eyeing the scout carefully.

But, though Buffalo Bill returned the compliment, he failed to recognise the man. He replied in the affirmative, and the stranger extended his hand in a friendly manner.

"Yeu kin rack yer brain, pard scout, but yeu don't know me by sight, though maybe you've heard tell of me. I'm Slug Seven, the trapper," he said.

Buffalo Bill gave a slight start, which the trapper was quick to note, although he made no comment thereon.

"Do you know the adobe settlement back east?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Guess I ought to, but it ain't a very particular kind o' place. What have them boys been doing now, pard?"

"The place has been raided by Comanches, and the settlers have been killed to a man, including a small company of the Fifth Cavalry," replied the scout quickly.

Of course, this was already known to Slug Seven, but the rascal was bent on playing a double game, and it suited him to express alarm and consternation at the news.

Buffalo Bill laboured under the disadvantage of not knowing that the rascal had led the desperadoes upon the Reverend Alexander Kingston's track. More lucky than his ruffianly companions, Slug Seven had himself escaped whilst they had been driven back by the Comanches.

"By the way, there was one man who escaped," continued the scout, not a little to the trapper's discomfort, who began to fancy that Cody was referring to himself.

"How did it all happen, pard?" he asked hurriedly.

"That I cannot say; but this man who escaped was, I believe, looked upon by the settlers as their leader. Perhaps you know him. I refer to Grasshopper Bill."

A sigh of genuine relief escaped the trapper. He understood the drift of the scout's remarks, and felt how nearly he had betrayed himself.

"Grasshopper Bill. He's a dead shot and a dangerous man to cross," he managed to blurt forth.

"He escaped," went on Buffalo Bill, hardly heeding the remark, "and somehow reached this neighbourhood; but a terrible Nemesis has overtaken him. He lies dead on this side of the lake."

Again Slug Seven simulated surprise.

As a matter of fact, he had watched the struggle between Cody and the desperado from an eminence some distance away, and it was owing to the death of Grasshopper Bill, whom he hated, that he had judged it expedient to make friendly overtures to the scout.

The trapper's deception was so artfully practised that, clever as Buffalo Bill was, as a rule, to detect anything suspicions in the conduct of those whom Fate threw across his path, he failed signally in this instance to discover the trapper's double dealing.

"Guess ef that reptile, Grasshopper Bill, had knowed I were so near, he'd have plugged daylight through me," Slug Seven observed.

Then he asked to be shown the body

of the desperado, and Cody led the way down to the water's edge.

Grasshopper Bill's body lay there in ghastly stillness, his features, even in death, bearing a look of agony and hate.

Acting on Buffalo Bill's suggestion, Slug Seven fastened a heavy stone to the dead man's feet, and, wading out into the lake, solemnly laid the corpse beneath the surface. He was hugely relieved when Buffalo Bill suggested that it might be advisable to quit the spot.

That night the two encamped in a small wood. Incidentally, Buffalo Bill had learned that his companion had seen Alec Kingston, and, as he felt anxious on the young clergyman's behalf, he decided to push on with all haste to Ned Masters's ranch.

But next day he felt almost too weak to move. Nevertheless, he pushed on in company with Slug Seven, who placed his horse at the scout's disposal.

Late in the afternoon of the third day they reached the trapper's cabin. It was then arranged that Slug Seven should ride on to Ned's ranch and ascertain whether Kingston had arrived.

CHAPTER 4.

Doomed to Torture.

The trapper started off the following morning, leaving Buffalo Bill to look after the shanty in his absence, which he reckoned would extend over four days. Buffalo Bill gladly consented to remain, for he had decided, if nothing occurred meanwhile to alter his plans, that on the return of Slug Seven he would make all despatch to Fort Ben, and apprise the commandant there of his danger. In four days' time he calculated to be fit once more for the trail.

Immediately after Slug Seven had departed Cody thoroughly explored the neighbouring glen, and took his bearings in case of eventualities. He found the shanty was more open to attack than he had at first supposed. It stood halfway up the glen, near a small but noisy cascade, while the quantity of timber surrounding it on all sides offered ample cover to an attacking force. The waterfall was, roughly, ten feet wide, faced on the opposite side by a rather steep bank, whose crest was covered by a dense oak scrub, while in the distance towered a range of forest-clad hills.

A small trench had been made on that side of the shanty next the cascade, and here Buffalo Bill passed the remainder of the day. He was sheltered from the sun's rays by a belt of tall pines, while through the glade formed by their level distance from each other he could command a view of the full length of the glen, as well as miles of open country beyond.

He found the place well stocked with food and all the necessaries of a frontiersman's life. Two large bales of pelts of all sorts and kinds attested to the trapper's industry. The shanty was not very large, but there was a long, low lean-to shed at the rear.

By the third day Buffalo Bill felt himself once more.

As darkness closed down the wind rose, and presently it was blowing a hurricane through the glen. Inside the shanty the scout had made all comfortable. A cheerful fire blazed on the hearth, while a substantial meal had been prepared to which he forthwith did ample justice. This disposed of, he extinguished the oil light and made himself snug by the fire.

The storm raged outside with unabated fury, bringing down occasionally some of the older trees with resonant crashes.

Buffalo Bill, buried in a pleasant reverie, forgot the warring of the elements outside, and in the flickering firelight he watched the thin, fantastic wreaths of tobacco-smoke while he puffed contentedly at his pipe. By degrees he began to doze.

He was roused by the fall of some embers on the hearth. The stress and noise of the storm was past, and an uncanny silence seemed to fill the glen. Feeling a little stiff, he got up, and something prompted him to go to the door, which he opened noiselessly, and peered out.

It was still early, for the moon was just rising.

As the scout crossed the threshold he was assailed from behind by a couple of

powerful warriors. One of them sprang at his throat, while the other attempted to bear him to the ground.

Simultaneously half a dozen more sprang through the open door, and in an instant overpowered Buffalo Bill's determined resistance. He was flung savagely down and bound hand and foot. One glance sufficed to show that his captors were Comanches.

"So the paleface dog would defy Flying Foot and his mighty warriors?" the chief cried exultingly, spurning the captive with his heel.

"Flying Foot is a bigger coward than the meanest squaw in his tribe," retorted Buffalo Bill. "He cannot fight like a warrior."

The taunt went home, and for a moment it looked as if the scout would be hacked to pieces by his infuriated captors.

One of the warriors had stirred the embers on the hearth into a blaze, and the ruddy flame disclosed ten hideously-painted faces. A thought seemed to strike Flying Foot, and he pointed grimly at the fire.

"Let the paleface dog die at the stake," he cried. "He shall whine for mercy but receive none. Behold, before the moon has run her course the paleface dog shall become the slave of the mighty Comanche warriors who have gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds."

A yell of acclamation greeted this terrible announcement.

The Comanches began a wild war-dance round their prostrate captive, working themselves into a perfect frenzy of rage. At length, to the accompaniment of a horrible dirge, four of their number suddenly swooped down and seized him. The rest broke away and began to ransack the shanty, smashing the furniture and forcing open lockers, cases, and bales.

Flying Foot and another warrior darted outside, and presently returned with part of a freshly-hewn fir, which they quickly fixed in position in the furthermost corner of the shanty. To this upright stake Buffalo Bill was bound.

With frenzied yells the remaining red men proceeded to dismantle the building, piling the wreckage round their captive, and then, to insure the success of their horrible purpose, they saturated the debris with oil and quantities of fat.

Meanwhile they lost no chance of taunting their victim and subjecting him to every conceivable indignity. Lastly Flying Foot removed his belt of revolvers, and placed them on an upturned barrel near the hearth, where a roaring wood fire had been built.

At a word from the chief the live embers were removed to the middle of the shanty, and a snake-like line of dry faggots was so placed as to connect the combustibles about the prisoner with the fire. This was done to satisfy a fiendish desire to prolong his misery and suspense.

As the warriors continued busily to heap up the debris, Flying Foot advanced on his helpless captive with drawn scalping-knife.

"The paleface dog's scalp shall be nailed to Flying Foot's wigwam, that the Comanche nation may know that he died like a dog," he cried.

"Flying Foot speaks big words, but his courage is weak. His hands tremble like a squaw's. He can only scalp a helpless prisoner," replied Cody.

The chief uttered a snarl of rage, and bounding up the wreckage, stood beside his captive.

At that moment an ear-piercing yell broke from the redskins at the furthest end of the shanty. There was a note of triumph mingled with surprise in that yell, and a fierce longing for possession, which instantly arrested the chief's attention.

Flying Foot bounded up to the warriors just as one of them staggered back under a fearful blow, followed by the crash and splintering of glass.

In the gloom Buffalo Bill distinguished a struggling mob of redskins, yelling fiercely, and apparently striving their hardest to deprive each other of some spoil. Even Flying Foot failed to quell the tumult.

As Buffalo Bill watched, with anxious, straining eyes, the truth came like an inspiration—they must have chanced upon a case of whisky.

His heart gave a leap, and a vision of

freedom rose before his mind's eye. If the vile concoction which in those parts went by the name of whisky was sufficiently strong, and the quantity was not lacking, those savage fiends might soon be lying in a heavy, drunken stupor.

All at once they began to stagger into the middle of the shanty, and as the now dull glow of the embers lit up their several forms the anxious captive noticed that each man carried a bottle of the intoxicating liquor. Flying Foot and one or two others had secured a couple of bottles apiece.

In the distance, where the trapper's hidden store had been broken open, lay three grimly silent forms. They had been killed in the struggle.

Amidst a fierce discord of sounds, the warriors flung themselves down beside the embers, which they stirred into a ruddy blaze. They struck off the necks of the bottles with their knives, and began to drink, apparently oblivious of their captive's presence.

Buffalo Bill took care to make no sound, but the constraint soon began to tell upon him, for in his already cramped position it meant indescribable agony to remain still.

He was at length compelled to shift his tightly-bound feet, and the moment he did so a piece of loose timber clattered down, making the Comanches start and face round.

Flying Foot staggered up, but the effects of the intoxicant were already apparent. He swayed heavily to and fro, and, as if conscious of his inability to reach the prisoner, he gave vent to a fierce yell, and simultaneously aimed his scalping-knife at him.

The weapon flashed across, and with a snip struck the upright stake to which Buffalo Bill was bound.

The moment he felt it strike the stake Cody moved rapidly back, giving an agonised groan, and hanging forward his head as though he had been struck and was badly wounded. He acted his part to perfection, and the half-drunken Comanches were deceived.

Flying Foot sat down, and at a gulp swallowed the remaining liquor in his bottle. He turned his attention to the second one; but one of the warriors seemed inclined to dispute his title to it. Instantly the two redskins were engaged in a deadly encounter; their tomahawks flashed in the firelight, while their horrible cries, mingling with the clash of steel, drowned the monotonous war-song which broke from the rest of the drunken wretches.

The struggle might have been providential so far as Buffalo Bill was concerned, for he had begun to plan a means of escape wherein Flying Foot's scalping-knife played a by no means unimportant part.

When in the act of simulating death a few minutes before, he had felt the weapon slip from the wood and drop amid the tough hide thongs which bound him to the stake. By working his body gently to and fro he hoped to fray the thongs against the keen edge of the knife. Hitherto the necessity for remaining absolutely still had hindered him, but now he was able to move rapidly to and fro without attracting the least attention.

The struggle proceeded, growing fiercer and louder, while both combatants had received flesh-wounds.

With eyes fixed intently upon the fighting Comanches, Buffalo Bill worked the knife laboriously further and further into the thongs which bound his arms to the stake. Now and again he felt the keen edge of the blade against his fingers, and he received many nasty cuts. But these passed unheeded. He was playing a high stake for freedom, and at all hazards he must free his arms ere the struggle between Flying Foot and the warrior ceased.

Buffalo Bill worked desperately, and his movements sent several pieces of timber clattering down from the heap. One of the redskins glanced round suspiciously, but the scout saw the action, and instantly resumed his passive attitude. Almost at the same moment the fierce struggle in the centre of the shanty came to an end. Reeking with perspiration, Flying Foot came out conqueror. He reeled down, and seizing the remaining bottle of spirit, proceeded to consume the contents.

More wood was piled on the fire, and soon the carousing redskins began to doze.

Buffalo Bill continued to watch Flying Foot and the two or three warriors who had not yet wholly succumbed to the intoxicating effects of the firewater. To alarm them now by the slightest noise would be taking too great a risk. He would have to wait till their senses were overcome by sleep.

Five—ten—twenty minutes passed, and then, with a lurch, Flying Foot rolled over near the fire, snoring loudly.

The rest of the warriors were already fast asleep.

The anxious captive strained at his thongs. Still they held. Again he proceeded to gently fray the edges; again he pulled. Then, after two of three ineffectual attempts, the stout hide suddenly parted, and Buffalo Bill breathed freely again.

He pressed quickly back again at the stake in order to prevent the knife from slipping down. Whilst in this position he began to move his free limbs, and in this manner removed the painful cramp which had seized them.

Next he secured the knife, and by a few rapid strokes soon released his ankles.

So far all was well. The smouldering train of fire had already crept halfway to the combustibles piled round the stake.

Buffalo Bill crept lightly down the wreckage on tiptoe, reached the upturned barrel next to the hearth, and snatching up his revolvers stepped towards the door, which was ajar. Reaching it he wriggled noiselessly through the narrow opening, fearing to widen it lest the keen-eared warriors might be aroused by the sound.

Once outside, he drew the door to and made his way cautiously through the avenue of trees surrounding the shanty, looking anxiously for the picketed ponies. He came upon them by the outskirt of the pine belt, and counted twelve. Picking out one which looked the freshest, he rode away.

CHAPTER 5.

The Stolen Treasure.

Two days later Buffalo Bill rode up to the deserted ruins of Ned Masters's ranch. He had managed to strike the right trail, and as he approached the place he kept his eyes alert for Indian signs. Only a few charred posts remained of the building, which had stood on the outskirt of a thick oak scrub.

He urged his Indian pony over a low, irregular-shaped bush, and with a rapid wheel to the left brought the little brute sharply up against the ruin.

Crack! A flash and a puff of white smoke from a distant bush showed him that an enemy lurked there. The shot struck the mustang, and sent the poor brute reeling over with a human-like cry of pain.

Buffalo Bill slipped to the ground untouched. The rough nature of the ground hid him from his unknown assailant, though a second shot came whistling overhead. The circumstance decided him that his opponent, whoever he might be, was certainly no redskin.

He wriggled noiselessly along through the bush and over the uneven ground, keeping his eye fixed on the spot whence the attack had first come. By degrees he approached it, working round to the rear; but no one was visible.

Suddenly he heard a faint movement, and springing to his feet he levelled his revolver and caught sight of the crouching figure of a negro. The man was in the very act of firing, and but for Buffalo Bill's agility he must have been struck by the shot. As it was, he covered his assailant and sternly ordered him to get up.

Reluctantly and slowly the negro obeyed the command.

"Throw down that rifle."

Not a little to his surprise, the negro burst into tears.

"Massa, don't shoot," he cried; "leastways, not yet till I've found Massa Ned. I's Black Ulick, his servant, and I kim here shortly after daybreak, after leaving Massa Kingston and Miss Lucy."

An exclamation of surprise broke from Buffalo Bill.

"Where have you been, and where do you come from?" he demanded quickly.

"I's been over ter Neil's Ranch down south wid Massa Kingston ter fetch Massa Ned's bride. Dey sent me on here last night ter tel de massa dey were coming. I give him call as I rode

up, but no answer; an' den I see de ranch is burnt. Indian debils hab been here, massa."

"That's very evident," replied Cody.

He had lowered his weapon, and moved close up to the negro, whose genuine distress could no longer be doubted.

"Why did you fire just now?" he asked curiously.

The negro regarded him for a moment critically, then he made a significant gesture, which drew Buffalo Bill's attention to his own tattered and generally disreputable appearance. The scout could not help smiling.

"I's seen some of de villains from de adobe settlement," remarked Black Ulick quite seriously; "but, golly! dey never look so bad as you do, sah. Dis chile thought you was one of dem cutthroats."

Buffalo Bill could not help laughing outright at the darkie's candid and very reasonable explanation.

"And who do you now suppose I am?" he demanded.

"De great chief of scouts, sah, Buffler Bill. I's seen yer picture down Neil's Ranch, Massa Bill."

"Who lives there?" demanded the scout, becoming suddenly interested, for it occurred to him that he might possibly have friends in the neighbourhood whom he knew nothing about.

"Waal, dere's de old man and woman, de young Massa Neil, and Missie Lucy, and I guess a score o' cowboys. Ole Neil's Ranch is a mighty big place, you bet, sah. It ain't nearer than three days' hard riding to the south. Massa Ned, him bin sweet on Missie Lucy come two year, when Massa Kingston, him an ole friend of Ned's, come along to marry 'em. He got here before we 'spected him, so Massa Ned sends dis chile wid de parson down ter Neil's Ranch, where we finds young Neil and de cowboys 'way back on a round-up. Dere warn't no one ter spare, so we starts back wid Missie Lucy and Sunflower——"

"Sunflower! Who is she?" asked Cody.

"I reckon she's de prettiest Injun girl in all de country," declared Black Ulick, with a promptitude which bespoke a keen personal admiration on his part. "Sunflower is de doughter of dat cutthroat villain, King Sun."

"Notwithstanding, she seems to be a friend of the Neils," the scout observed.

The negro lowered his voice, and placed a hand confidentially on Cody's arm.

"She don't much care for de Neils," he whispered; "it's Massa Ned she likes. He saved her life once."

"Have you discovered any signs of your master?"

"Dere's a trail of blood, sah, leading back inter de bush."

"What do you mean??

"Dere was a big treasure, sah; heaps of gold and silver buried at de end of de trail," was the whispered reply.

For some minutes Buffalo Bill was busily engaged reading the various signs on the ground, which he alone could distinguish. He picked up a small, curiously-fashioned piece of gold and examined it narrowly.

"Where did this come from?" he asked, exposing the little bit of precious metal to the negro's gaze.

"It b'longs to de treasure I spoke of, sah."

"I know that; but where did it come from originally?"

"Sah, I dare not tell. Massa Ned, find him and ask."

"It is because I wish to find him that I ask you. Come, my man, no nonsense. It's probably a matter of life or death to your master."

"Waal, sah," observed the negro, "dat bit o' gold come from de ruins where King Sun lives. Massa Ned knows where to find heap more gold, but he tell no one but Black Ulick. We get it all from de ruins since last fall. It took Massa Ned a long time to find de treasure."

"And now it is lost, and he has disappeared. This looks like foul play."

For some time Buffalo Bill remained buried in thought. From what he had gleaned of Slug Seven's duplicity, it struck him that the trapper might have had a hand in the present outrage.

Finally he decided to remain by the burned ranch and despatch the negro to meet the young clergyman and his party. Black Ulick was willing enough to go, but he evinced some uneasiness

when he found that Cody was going to remain behind. But the scout was inexorable. He prepared his companion for the possibility of not finding Kingston, in which event it was arranged that Black Ulick should return to the demolished ranch for further orders.

After the negro had departed Buffalo Bill took careful stock of his surroundings, noting every sign upon the ground. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of surprise, and next moment he held the broken haft of a hunter's knife in his hand. The initals "S. S." had been scratched across the bone.

"That's conclusive," he muttered. "Slug Seven has been here; also a strong force of Comanches. They divided in the bush, one part going south and the other due north. The latter bore away a prisoner—the same who apparently had first taken the precaution to remove his loot, which he has placed in the centre of the gorse. A clever plan."

By parting the prickly foliage Cody could just distinguish the glittering treasure in the very heart of the great bush. He could not reach it, and indeed he made no attempt to do so, for his whole thoughts were centred on the missing settlers.

CHAPTER 6.

Sunflower, the Comanche Maiden.

The shades of night were beginning to fall when Black Ulick returned in pitiable distress with the news that Kingston and his party had been captured by the Comanches.

One hour later the two men took the trail of the marauders.

Though the moon did not rise for a couple of hours, they experienced little difficulty in keeping to the trail, which consisted of a tortuous track through dense brushwood. They pressed on afoot. The few ponies belonging to Ned Masters the Comanches had taken away. Nevertheless, Buffalo Bill had managed to secure a fresh rifle and a supply of cartridges. He owed this to the young rancher's foresight in having stored a small quantity of arms and ammunition in a rocky cleft close to the ranch.

About midnight Cody decided to rest. A few hours later they were again on the trail, which led them through a wilderness of scrub. The country appeared to have been ravaged at some distant date by a vast forest fire, for only here and there a few ironwood trees were standing; the rest consisted of young growth. Certain kinds of small game existed in abundance, and the men made an excellent breakfast. Water also was plentiful. Their progress was necessarily slow, and it was not until the afternoon of the following day that they gained the neighbourhood of the mysterious ruins.

Here, for the first time, Black Ulick evinced signs of uneasiness, and more than once the scout was forced to urge him sharply on. He seemed to wish to hang back, and though, when questioned, he expressed the same devotion to his master, he appeared loth to approach nearer to the spot where he had every reason to believe his master was held a captive.

They had penetrated nearly a mile into a forest of black oaks, when the negro, trembling all over, turned to Buffalo Bill and faltered out that he could go no further.

"What's the matter?" the scout demanded.

Before Black Ulick could reply Cody was startled to hear himself addressed by name in a singularly soft and musical voice.

"Let not my paleface brother move if he would save his life."

Buffalo Bill remained motionless and silent for more than a minute, unpleasantly conscious that he was wholly at the mercy of this unknown newcomer.

"Who speaks?" he then demanded.

"The Spirit of the Wood. Let the paleface warrior go back."

Cody gave a start, for the voice sounded much nearer. A feeling of anger possessed him. Suddenly his attention was attracted to Black Ulick, who with a lurch rolled to his feet unconscious.

A moment later the bushes parted in front and a figure stood before him.

To say that he was amazed barely describes his feelings at that moment. He had expected a painted redskin of

savage aspect. Instead he found his challenge answered by a young Indian girl.

Tall, light, and gracefully formed, she looked the sylvan goddess of her native wilds. Her features were of remarkable regularity, and even had they been less regular her magnificent dark eyes would have given a sprightliness and animation to her countenance preferable to mere beauty of outline. Strings of coloured beads were woven in the braids of her long hair, and wound round her head. Large golden rings hung in her ears, and her neck was covered with chains of gold of quaint design. A calico robe of gorgeous colours was fastened at the waist with a richly wrought wampum belt, and moccasins, embroidered with beads, covered her delicate feet.

The girl carried a small rifle, and faced Buffalo Bill defiantly.

"The paleface is bold," she observed.

Cody watched her quietly for some moments before replying. There was something in her manner which convinced him that she was ill at ease, though whether on account of his presence or for some other reason he had no means of deciding. He shaped his reply accordingly.

"The Sunflower speaks wisely," he said. "The paleface is bold to avenge the injury of a comrade."

The Indian maiden gave a queer little smile.

"He is foolish to brave the wrath of the great medicine-man, King Sun," she answered. "Wherefore does he venture into the Comanches' hunting-grounds with the black man?"

Buffalo Bill saw that she was halting between two opinions. Sunflower loved Ned Masters, who was a prisoner, probably under sentence of torture and death, and she wished to save him, but could not do so without outside aid.

"Why does Sunflower seek the help of the paleface?"

"Does the paleface know that Sunflower has but to call and a hundred braves will spring from the woods and surround him?" she said.

"But Sunflower would rather die than call."

"Why?"

Her eyes flashed the question.

"Because the paleface is of more use to her alive than dead."

"Buffalo Bill, the great paleface warrior, speaks truly. Sunflower would sooner die than call her braves," the girl replied, in a low but firm undertone. "He can trust her. See! she buries the hatchet."

As she spoke, Sunflower snatched a small, gold-tipped tomahawk from her wampum belt, where it had hitherto been concealed, and drove blade and haft into the soft, yielding ground. It was an act which meant much, and when, with a gesture of impatience, she intimated to Buffalo Bill that she desired him to follow her, he knew that she entertained no designs upon his own freedom. He happened, however, to observe Black Ulick, who had partly recovered consciousness. The girl noted him, too, and brushing past the scout, bent over the prostrate negro.

"If the black man would live, let him not move till the paleface returns with his master," she commanded.

A frightened gasp was the only answer the negro made, but it apparently satisfied the Indian maiden, who, beckoning to Buffalo Bill, darted into the undergrowth.

The scout was not slow to follow; but he soon found it difficult to keep pace with his agile guide. The undergrowth seemed to become denser as they advanced, till, shrouded in gloom, they reached a spot where further outlet seemed impossible.

The girl paused and turned to her companion.

"Why did the paleface chief venture hither?" she asked, once again.

"To seek his friends. Surely Sunflower has not dealt kindly with them; her father's braves have carried them off, and they have burned the paleface's ranch——"

He got no further, for a gasp, something between a cry of pain and terror, broke from the girl. She gripped his arm almost fiercely.

"They have burned my white brother's ranch, and what more?" she exclaimed.

Intuitively Buffalo Bill guessed that she referred to the presence of the trea-

sure. It was a matter which he hardly understood himself, and consequently the subject was a delicate one to handle. In any case, it was clear that if the treasure had been removed from the ruins the girl was aware of the fact.

"I know not what else," he answered, "unless it be that something that was hidden in the ground near the ranch has been dug up."

"My father's braves are cursed; let them die like squaws. Let them fall before the shooting-rods of the paleface warriors. Sunflower has spoken. They would slay her paleface brother; he saved her life once, and she loves him; but for many moons her heart has been sick to death. He loves a paleface maiden, and he looks no more with favour upon the face of his Indian sister. But Sunflower can save him if the paleface scout will help."

"The paleface will do what Sunflower wants, on one condition."

"King Sun must have a victim," she answered quickly. "The paleface maiden must die."

"Nay; she must be freed with the others."

There was a note of decision in Buffalo Bill's retort which impressed his companion, who offered no reply whatever, but seizing him by the wrist led him up to a leafy barrier. As well as he could make out in the deep gloom, it was impassable. Nevertheless, the girl lightly moved back the surface foliage, and exposed behind a pitchy-black cavity.

The descent was long and tedious, but it finally brought him out on to a narrow ledge, almost hidden by the close-growing trees above and below.

Sunflower was standing at the further end, where, through a gap, the sunlight streamed down.

Cody caught a glimpse of the scene beyond, and it startled him. The ground dipped for three or four hundred feet, forming an extensive hollow, from the middle of which there rose stupendous walls. Some were covered with shrubs and embowered in wild vines, while upon the wide tops of others great trees had fastened their roots.

Inside the walls towered the sides of vast buildings, all roofless, and many in a state of complete decay. These, then were the mysterious ruins which had lately so excited his curiosity, the very existence of which he had previously discredited.

"The paleface must go forward blindfolded. He can trust Sunflower," she whispered.

Before Buffalo Bill could reply she deftly covered his eyes with a broad but soft strip of buffalo-hide. And then the final descent was made.

At length his guide stopped, and telling him to kneel she pressed a line of matted thongs between his hands.

"Let the paleface slip down the rope," she whispered. "Sunflower will follow."

Without a word, but with a tolerably good idea of the course which he had taken, the scout acted on this suggestion. Blindfolded, and with his rifle slung across his back, he swung over the edge of what at first he took to be a steep precipice, but which by the feel he soon discovered to be one of the stupendous walls he had viewed from above.

He began to slip slowly down the line, straining his ears to catch the sound of his companion's descent. He had probably descended a distance of thirty feet when he felt the line tighten above, followed by a swaying movement, which told him that Sunflower was descending upon him. A few seconds later he was standing on firm ground.

Cody was hugely relieved when the girl removed the bandage from his eyes. He noticed that they were at the end of a darkened chamber. The roof must have been very high, for it was not visible. But he looked in vain for their place of descent.

"Let not the paleface seek to pierce the mysteries of the great temple," said Sunflower, in a slightly mocking tone. "He shall save his friends, but death shall be his portion if he does more."

She glided swiftly forward, as if anxious to get Buffalo Bill away; but he was not to be denied. Pretending to stumble, he took a swift but accurate survey of the ground, and directly behind he noted a small shaft of daylight. In a moment the truth flashed

upon him—the wall there was doubled; they had descended a shaft.

He resumed an upright position before the Indian girl's suspicions could be roused, and as she came up he complained of the gloom and impossibility of picking a safe course over the many obstacles on the ground.

"Let the paleface follow Sunflower," she whispered. "Speak not so loud, lest the warriors of the dead notion be roused from their long sleep."

Buffalo Bill supposed that she was striving to play upon his fears, but he soon discovered that her words referred literally to the condition of the chamber, which, to his horror, he found, on proceeding, to be really a mighty catacomb strewn with dead forms—human figures dried and withered, once swathed in fabrics which had long since fallen to shreds.

Cody believed them to be the remains of that ancient and mysterious race, the Toltecs, which became extinct many centuries ago, the people who erected these and other mighty buildings in the wildest and most inaccessible parts of the great West.

Still, that the bodies should have been allowed to remain there uncovered gave him food for reflection, knowing as he did the repugnance entertained by every Comanche warrior to the presence of the dead. The only conclusion he could arrive at fitted in with the facts—namely, the existence of these catacombs could not be generally known to the Comanches, consequently the passage he was traversing, and the mode of reaching it, must be equally unfamiliar to them.

Cody watched the Indian girl very closely. To her, at least, the passage seemed familiar, for she turned corners and darted along narrow alcoves flanked by massive walls without the slightest hesitation.

Buffalo Bill began to wonder vaguely when this zigzag course would end. Then, imperceptibly at first, but as he continued to follow the maiden, growing ominously distinct, a variety of sounds burst upon his ears. They consisted of the savage barking of dogs, mingled with the shouts and singing of a number of Comanches.

The scout unslung his rifle and kept closer to his guide, who suddenly paused.

"The paleface must put up his shooting-rod," she whispered, "and trust to the lightness of his feet. Behold, my father's braves!"

Buffalo Bill started, so great was his surprise, for as the girl spoke she drew aside some hanging buffalo hides and disclosed to his gaze the vast proportions of an old Toltec temple. The roof was curtained in darkness, but the immense size of the building was dimly visible in the flickering light of many fires equi-distant from each other. Grouped about the fires were the Comanches, from whose throats rose a weird and dismal chant. As the notes rose and fell, each man struck the naked blade of his neighbour's scalping-knife with his own. It was an uncanny scene.

Sunflower dropped back the buffalo-skin.

"A hundred braves are there," she whispered unsteadily; "and they are waiting to kill the victims who die upon the altar to the great god of the temple. Does the paleface hear the dogs? They will presently tear the paleface prisoners to pieces. Let us hasten."

Again she raised the buffalo hangings and was about to step into the gloomy temple when Buffalo Bill quickly restrained her by grasping her hand.

"Hold! The paleface has now seen enough. He would be led to his friends that he may save them from—from this!" he faltered.

"Let the paleface step lightly in the shadow of Sunflower, and may his steps be as swift as the wind. The way leads through the temple of the gods," replied the girl, in a faint whisper.

She waited for no reply, but, disengaging her hand, glided rather than stepped into the grim enclosure.

Taking care to have his rifle in readiness, the scout slipped off his heavy boots, and, tucking them under one arm, he passed into the dimly-lit temple after his guide.

Quickly yet cautiously the two figures stole along in the shadow of the wall; the gleam of the fires did not reach them, yet it needed but a false move,

the very faintest sound, to discover them to those bloodthirsty worshippers.

At length they slipped past the last flickering fire and were smothered up in complete darkness. Sunflower caught up the barrel of her companion's rifle and thus she led him forward.

A faint gleam of light ahead, growing more lurid as they advanced, told Buffalo Bill that they were approaching another fire. The fierce snarling of hungry dogs sounded ominously in the distance.

CHAPTER 7.

Jealousy and Treachery.

KEEPING well to the wall, Buffalo Bill and Sunflower crept up to where the great fire blazed. The loud yelping of the dogs made speech impossible, but the girl turned and made a sign which her companion readily understood.

In obedience to it he dropped on hands and knees and followed her as she walked along boldly to the end of a tapering passage. Suddenly she disappeared, and, as if by magic, the dogs hushed their fierce yelping. A moment later Cody, too, passed the end of the passage and crossed the threshold of a dimly lit hall of the same imposing dimensions as those which he had already traversed. He then heard his own name pronounced, and a glad cry of recognition burst from his lips.

"Kingston! Thank Heaven I have found you!" he exclaimed, starting forward, only to recoil involuntarily.

The young clergyman was secured to a tall, upright stake, and as the scout moved towards him a large dog sprang out, and, snarling fiercely, rushed forward, displaying its gleaming fangs. As it sprang almost within biting distance of the helpless prisoner, something seemed to jerk it backwards.

With rifle clubbed, Buffalo Bill darted past his bound friend and struck the brute a fearful blow, killing it instantly.

Next moment he uttered a cry of fear, for upon all sides a yelping mass of dogs sprang up. He must have been torn to pieces but for Sunflower's promptitude in dragging him away.

"The paleface is not wise!" she cried. "Behold his friend!"

She pointed past Kingston, and in the gloom beyond he noticed another figure—the figure of a young man, slight, but muscular, and singularly good-looking. Though Buffalo Bill had never seen him before, he knew this must be Ned Masters. Instinctively he sought for the third prisoner.

Sunflower seemed to understand what was passing in his mind, for, with a bitter laugh, she stepped to the scout's side and led him through the snarling, straining pack of wolfish dogs to where the third prisoner was fastened.

"Behold the Golden Hair who has stolen the love of the paleface from Sunflower!" she cried.

Her voice, which was just audible above the fierce discord, attracted the unhappy captive's attention. She looked round, and in the gloom her eyes met Buffalo Bill's. A lovelier face the scout had never seen. The Indian girl laughed tauntingly.

"Listen!" she cried, addressing the prisoners in English. "Once in many moons the great medicine-man of the Comanche nation holds a dog-feast in the temple of the gods, when a living victim is sacrificed to the Great Spirit. The moon will rise to-night on such a scene unless Sunflower saves the paleface prisoners. They are her friends; one of them she loves better than her own life, but he scorns her love and has given his heart into the keeping of Golden Hair. That must not be. The paleface must marry Sunflower, or he shall die, and his friends, too. Sunflower has spoken. She will return presently and learn what the paleface has decided to do."

A grim silence followed this announcement, broken only by the retreating movements of the speaker. She was gone before Buffalo Bill could offer any reply.

Instantly the fierce yelping of the dogs broke out again, making speech impossible. The brutes were chained to small stakes driven into the ground, and so arranged as to make it impossible for them to attack the prisoners.

As Buffalo Bill noted this, something else arrested his attention. The dim light which filled the hall, and which he had first supposed was the reflection of the scattered fires, really proceeded

from that portion faced by the prisoners and occupied by himself. Wheeling round, he was startled to behold what very closely resembled a wall of pale bluish flame trembling weirdly in the gloom. The truth flashed suddenly upon him: it was phosphorous. The very nature of the buildings would account for this.

With an inward sense of relief Cody turned his attention to the prisoners. Kingston was the nearest, and as he approached him the savage dogs strained at their leashes, striving furiously to get at him.

"How did you get here, sir?" asked the young clergyman hoarsely. "We—we had given up all hope."

"I followed your trail, and the Indian girl was good enough to bring me hither. You have heard her conditions?"

"Yes; I heard, but they will never be complied with."

"But the sacrifice will ensure your freedom as well as the lady's. Have you any proposal to make?"

"Yes, Colonel Cody, I have. Listen! You are free—at least you are not fastened hand and foot as we are; you can release us. Ned must get into my clothes, and I will get into his. The disguise may be a poor one, but all the same it may serve to ensure his safety and Miss Neil's."

"And you?" inquired the scout.

"No matter; I accept the risk. Believe me, colonel, this is the only chance. Take no refusal from either Ned or Miss Neil. You understand, sir?"

"I understand that you are willing to make an heroic sacrifice," responded Buffalo Bill, who, while Alec Kingston was speaking, had been busy cutting through the thongs which bound him to the stake.

A few minutes later he had performed the same valuable service for Ned Masters. The latter was slightly shorter, and not quite so broad in build as Kingston, though in the gloom the difference was not easily detected.

In a few hurried words Kingston explained his plan to Ned, but the latter indignantly refused to avail himself of the young clergyman's generosity.

"Unhappily I am the innocent cause of our present dire straits," he cried. "I am not afraid to brave the danger, though I shudder at poor Lucy's hideous fate. She can slip away unseen now with you, Colonel Cody."

"That is sheer madness," said Buffalo Bill, partly in anger, though he admired the grand courage which the young pioneer displayed. "I do not know the turns and twists of this uncanny place sufficiently well to be sure of a successful issue. You do. And if this lady has to be saved it is to you to whom we look to save her. Come, sir, I see no alternative. You must change places with Alec Kingston."

Ned Masters waited to hear no more. Almost before Cody had finished speaking he darted through the gloom up to Lucy's side.

"My darling," he whispered, "have courage; we shall escape. You have heard of Colonel Cody. It is he who has liberated me, and here he comes to free you, too."

Alec also joined the group and made known his proposal to Lucy.

"Mr. Kingston," she said, "it would not be right to accept your noble sacrifice. When Sunflower returns she will at once detect the imposture, and our case would then be hopeless. We must escape now together."

At that moment she was startled by the sound of a heavy fall and a cry of dismay from Buffalo Bill, who, unwittingly, had ventured too near one of the great dogs. With a fierce growl the animal had seized him, and in a moment he was down. Ere his friends could come to his assistance a shrill cry of alarm broke from a crouching figure on the threshold of the mighty hall.

"Quick! Merciful Heaven, we are discovered!" gasped Ned.

He caught Lucy up in his arms and darted across the vast chamber towards the distant, phosphorescent band of light.

Alec saw him stagger, and at a couple of bounds reached his side in time to support Ned's lovely burden.

"Look out!" he whispered. "The redskin girl has brought the whole crew of braves upon us!"

It was true. The Indian girl's loud cry had brought a score of braves racing over the threshold.

With all the cunning of her race she had returned unnoticed to the chamber, and watched Buffalo Bill release the three captives. She had waited there on the threshold undecided for a few moments. Then, overcome by a fierce pang of jealous rage, she had raised the alarm, and now, like a tigress, she was urging the braves to again secure the prisoners.

This was soon done, despite their struggles, and Alec, Ned, and Lucy found themselves in the toils once more.

The Indian girl, with all the innate cruelty of her nation roused to a fierce pitch, fixed her eyes gloatingly upon the helpless paleface maiden—the girl whose father's hospitality she had so recently enjoyed—the girl for whom she had often expressed the most engaging friendship. No gentle feeling filled Sunflower's breast now; she was cruel—pitilessly cruel. She had never intended that either Lucy Neil or Alec Kingston should escape. She herself, while enjoying the shelter of Neil's Ranch, had planned their capture. Her father's braves had surrounded them an hour after Black Ulick had been despatched to Ned with the news of their approach.

Sunflower had deemed it prudent to accompany the braves to the ruins, intending herself to convey the news of Lucy's end to Ned. But she had not reckoned upon the bitter hostility of the trapper, Slug Seven, to Ned Masters. The trapper knew that the Comanches had been sent upon the warpath by the crafty medicine-man King Sun in order that the latter might secretly remove the Toltec treasure in the temple of the gods to a more secure hiding-place. He had found out, moreover, that Ned, with the connivance of Sunflower, had frequently visited the ruins and carried away a small fortune, but he did not know where this was deposited.

When Slug Seven had offered to carry Buffalo Bill's message to Ned's Ranch, it was with the express purpose of disclosing the above facts to King Sun.

The medicine-man acted promptly by

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surrounding the ranch and burning it to the ground. Ned unluckily fell into his hands. Consequently, Sunflower's distress had been genuine when she found Ned a prisoner and doomed to suffer the same fate as that which she herself had designed for Lucy and Alec Kingston. Chance had brought Buffalo Bill to the spot, and she had seen an opportunity of saving Ned, but she had no intention of allowing the others to escape.

As she glanced now from Lucy to Ned her fierce jealousy condemned him to the same fate. The climax was reached. She spoke some words to the braves, and the great chamber rang with their fierce, exulting shout.

It was this shout which roused Buffalo Bill from the stupor following his sudden fall. By a wonderful providence he had missed fatal injury by rolling just out of reach of the dogs' fangs. He now caught a glimpse of the disappearing crowd of braves, and the whole fearful tragedy flashed upon him at once.

"Apparently that little vixen has overlooked me in the struggle," he muttered. "That shall be her undoing, I'll save her victims, or die in harness."

Buffalo Bill snatched up his rifle, and, scrambling to his feet, started at a run for the passage. He had proceeded but a very little distance when a strange thought occurred to him. He halted and ran his eye quickly over the crowd of yelping dogs.

"By Heaven, I'll do it!" he cried. "There's some risk, but it may save them."

He took a few rapid steps back and leaned his rifle against one of the upright stakes. In an instant his knife was out. He felt the keen edge to make all sure, then, springing in amongst the dogs, he seized the foremost by the throat in such a manner that it was impossible for the brute to bite him. One sweep of the knife severed the leash around the animal's neck which secured it to the chain attached to the stake.

The beast, struggling in his grasp, bounded forward, but in a trice Buffalo Bill lifted it off its feet and carried it snapping and snarling to where the trembling line of phosphorescent light rose and fell. The brute renewed its frantic struggles as he rolled it in the phosphorus. Finally he let it go.

Like a living fire-ball, and mad with terror, the dog dashed off.

In quick rotation Buffalo Bill treated similarly five more of the brutes, which rushed off in the luminous tracks of the first. Then, recovering his rifle, he passed hurriedly out of the weird chamber. Halfway down the passage he distinguished the smoking shapes of the terrified animals. They were uttering such cries as he knew would assuredly attract the attention of the Comanches to them.

A heavy curtain of buffalo-hides barred their passage, but this was suddenly drawn aside.

The first dog sprang at the sentinel. There was a struggle, a scream, followed by a perfect pandemonium of sounds as the ghostly-looking brutes bounded into the great temple.

A fearful panic then seized the Comanche braves. Naturally superstitious, and surrounded by the grim secrets of the past, the first gasp of surprise gave place to unreasoning terror when they beheld the six luminous forms rush into their midst.

In a moment their intended victims were forgotten. The guards who supported the three prisoners fled, giving vent to howls of terror, and their example was instantly followed by the rest of the braves. Their panic-stricken yells smothered the fierce yelping of the dogs, which immediately attacked them. Two or three of the brutes were slain, and then the truth began to dawn upon a few of the braves, who, headed by King Sun, strove desperately to rally the panic-stricken redskins.

CHAPTER 8.

The Doom of Slug Seven.

Buffalo Bill, who had watched the scene from the entrance to the temple, saw the tall, almost naked figure of the medicine-man hurl himself upon Alec Kingston.

Ned was supporting the unconscious form of Lucy.

Quick as thought the scout brought

his rifle to his shoulder, and, taking rapid aim at his friend's assailant, fired.

King Sun, the medicine-man of the Comanche nation, sprang high into the air, and dropped back across one of the smouldering fires.

Terror-stricken, the few Comanches who had rallied round him fled. They heard neither the sound of the shot nor perceived the firer, and in the confusion Buffalo Bill found it comparatively easy to steal up to his friends.

"Thank Heaven, I've come in time!" he cried. "But a moment's delay is dangerous. Sunflower is not deceived, and she is rallying the warriors yonder."

Buffalo Bill was not mistaken, for the Indian girl, who had divined the truth from the outset, began to realise that her fierce revenge was likely to be snatched away. She caught sight of the scout and, raising her voice to a shrill pitch, succeeded in drawing the attention of several of the Comanches to him.

Lucy Neil was lying unconscious in Ned's arms. Buffalo Bill snatched her up, and, followed by Alec and Ned, dashed across the vast building, pursued by a flight of arrows.

"They are after us!—quick!" he cried. "Take my rifle, and keep them at bay!"

A few moments later they had gained the cover of the passage leading into the catacombs, but they heard Sunflower's shrill voice still urging the Comanches on.

"The brutes are hot upon our trail," said Cody hoarsely.

At length they stumbled through the catacombs into a narrow shaft of light.

"Do you know the way, Ned Masters?" demanded the scout.

"Yes; there's a passage in the wall ten feet from the end of the line."

"Then look slippery. I'll hand Miss Neil up to you."

Buffalo Bill was as good as his word, for Ned having swarmed up the line, a height of ten feet, planted his legs firmly inside a recess in the wall, and reaching down, seized the still unconscious girl whom Cody had supported.

"Press upwards," the scout cried; "don't wait for us. We will follow."

He had scarcely finished when Kingston discharged the remaining barrel of the scout's rifle. He turned to Buffalo Bill with a scared look.

"We shall never keep them at bay," he cried; "they are swarming through the catacombs."

"Can you climb?" asked the scout.

"Yes."

"Then swarm up that line and follow Ned; he'll need your help to get Miss Neil along. Never mind me; I'll manage to stay these brutes' rush. If we once get out of this horrible trap we'll show them a clean pair of heels."

Buffalo Bill spoke in a tone which permitted no refusal. He snatched the rifle from Kingston, and as the latter began to swarm up the line he darted to the opening of the shaft and took a hurried survey of the oncoming foe.

Nearly fifty Comanches were racing through the catacombs, the foremost being within a few dozen yards of the open shaft.

Buffalo Bill saw that there was no time to reload, so slinging the rifle across his back, he drew his brace of revolvers and fired point-blank at the oncoming redskins.

A yell of agony, followed by another and another, showed that the shots had told.

Glancing anxiously back, he saw that Alec had gained the recess above, and was in the act of assisting Ned to bear Lucy up the rough-hewn steps in the side of the wall.

Now or never! He had emptied the contents of both revolvers, and had momentarily checked the redskins' advance. He turned, and at a bound reached the trailing line.

With his teeth set and every muscle strained to the utmost, Buffalo Bill swarmed up, gained the recess, and pressed hurriedly back against the wall to avoid the shower of arrows which the enraged Comanches let fly.

He was thankful to know that his companions were, for the time being at least, beyond the range of these deadly missiles. As he leaned back, panting under the exertions he had undergone, the head and shoulders of a warrior who had swarmed up the line after him appeared.

The Comanche gave a yell and prepared to scramble into the recess.

Buffalo Bill drew his hunting-knife and struck at the redskin, who, with a gasp and a shudder, plunged down.

Another moment and the scout began to mount the rough-hewn steps. They reached nearly to the top of the wall, but the intervening space was easily crossed by the help of the line. Here he found his companions, and Ned, with a swift blow of his knife, severed the rope, thus checking the Indians' pursuit.

Hurrying up the twisting tunnel in the rock the little party presently reached the densely-timbered slope. Instead of making the ascent here, Ned turned off to the right, explaining that the track he had taken, though longer, would be the easier to surmount. And so it proved. Again they were plunged into subterranean darkness, emerging at last amid the thick undergrowth of the wood above.

All at once a figure loomed across their path.

"It's Black Ulick! Hurrah!" shouted Ned, dashing forward to reassure the negro, who appeared distracted with fear.

It seemed that a party of Comanches had gained the wood through another channel, and were then beating through the undergrowth to secure the fugitives. Nothing daunted, Buffalo Bill led his little party off at right angles till further progress was arrested by an almost perpendicular break in the ground.

To retreat was out of the question, their only chance lay in climbing one of the black oaks and getting away later on under cover of tht darkness.

The proposal was more easily made than carried out, but at last they were safely esconced among the forking branches overhead. In suspense they waited while the sounds of pursuit came nearer and still nearer. Suddenly a despairing cry, clear and sharp, rang out above the yells of the Comanches.

A moment later the figure of Slug Seven burst into sight. A shower of arrows swept after him, and he staggered, lurched heavily, and dropped to the ground. Before he could rise a redskin sprang out of the bush and dealt him a fatal blow with his tomahawk. Then the rest of the Comanches, coming up, discovered that the victim was not one of the fugitives, as they had all imagined.

The features of the redskin who had killed Slug Seven were suddenly exposed to the anxious fugitives in the tree. He was Flying Foot! He spoke a few words which appeared to have a magical effect on the braves, who seized the body of the trapper and dragged it into the bush. Their shouts presently grew fainter and fainter.

Buffalo Bill learned from Black Ulick that Flying Foot and Slug Seven had followed his trail from the burned ranch. Doubtless the chief of the Comanches had long bided his opportunity to remove Slug Seven from his path, and he embraced it when he heard that the trapper's powerful friend, the medicine-man, was slain.

Flying Foot was now the supreme head of the Comanche nation.

Under cover of darkness the little party escaped, and, after enduring a week of ceaseless anxiety, safely reached Neil's Ranch.

Buffalo Bill was of course acclaimed the hero of the day by Lucy's grateful parents, as well as by the admiring cowboys belonging to the Neil outfit.

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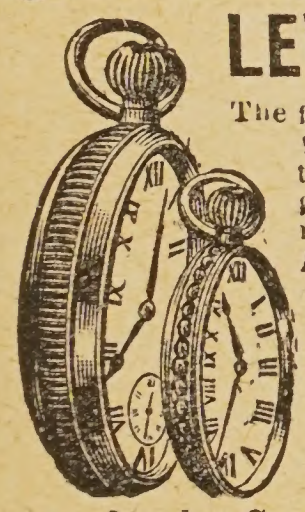

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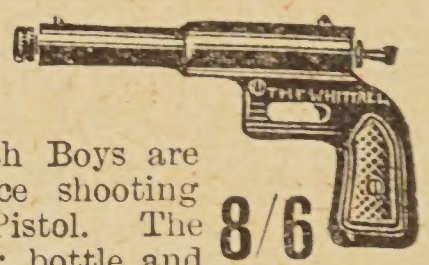

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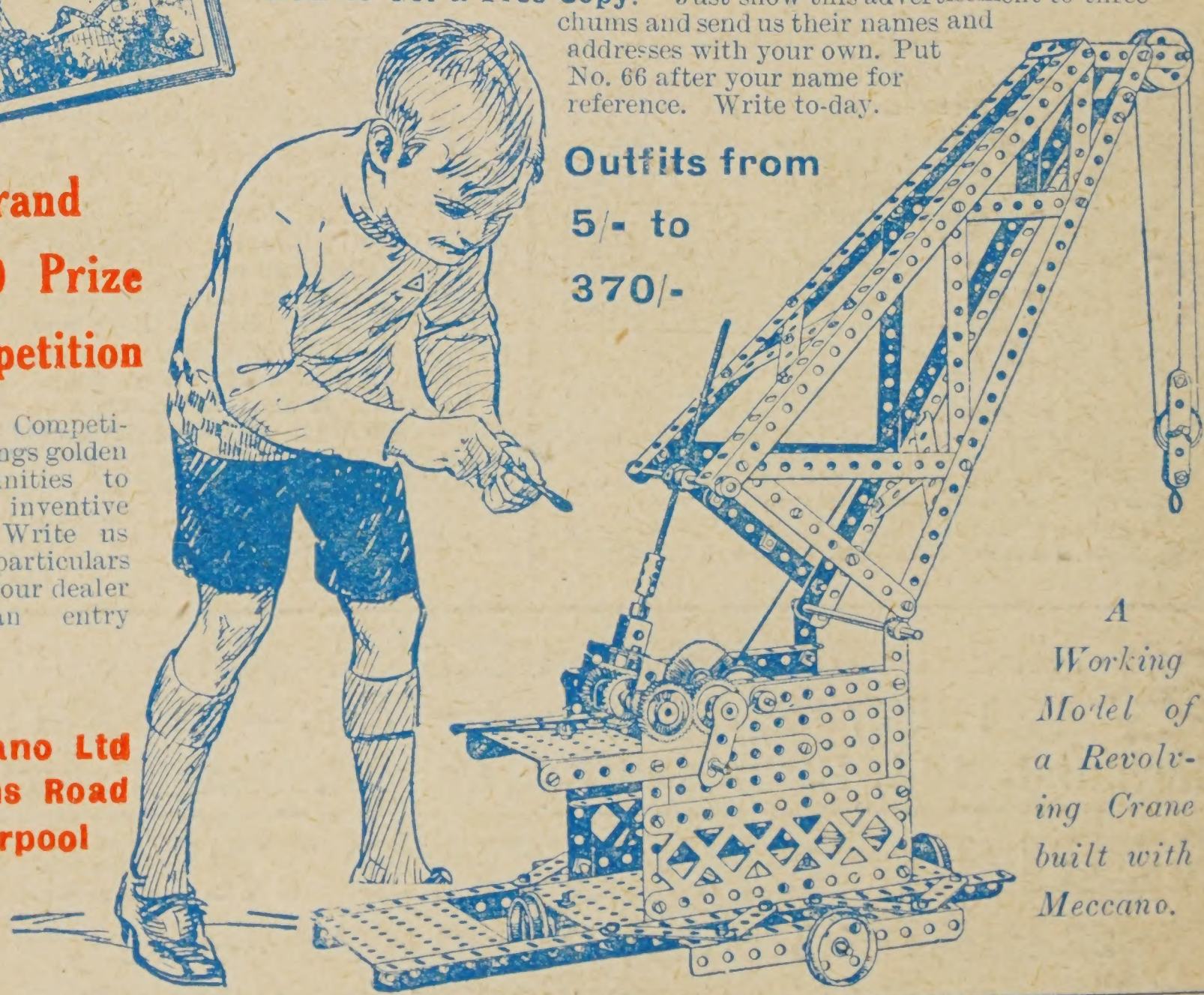

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